

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL

# Battalion Fire Chief

## Examination Orientation Guide



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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The information in this booklet will help give you a general understanding of the testing process and answer some of your questions about how to prepare for the examination. For specific information about the current testing cycle, which includes the most recent test announcement for the Battalion Chief exam, please check the Department of Personnel's website [Current Administration Orientation Guide](#).

The exam has been designed on the basis of information obtained from a job analysis of the position of Fire Battalion Chief in the State of New Jersey. The job analysis provides a description of the tasks performed by incumbents and identifies the knowledge, skills and abilities that are required to perform each of these tasks effectively.

This guide was written to assist candidates in preparing for the Structured Oral Interview and Oral Analysis/Presentation Exercise. We are providing this information in recognition that a considerable amount of the anxiety associated with participation in the promotional assessment process is related to the novelty of the procedures that candidates encounter. From the information presented in this guide, candidates should be able to get a better understanding of the types of questions they will encounter on each exam component and a systematic method of study which they may use in preparing for the exam.

We encourage candidates to review this guide carefully and to take advantage of any and all opportunities to prepare for the exam.

**GOOD LUCK!**

*Note: The format of the test is subject to the review and approval by the United States Department of Justice. Consequently, it is possible that the test format/design could change prior to the administration of this examination.*

## **II. DESCRIPTION OF THE EXAM**

### **A. Test Date, Time, and Location**

Once you have been admitted to the examination, you will receive a Notification Card in the mail that shows the date, time, location and room to which you should report for your examination. Please bring the Notification Card, two forms of identification, two pencils, two pens and a highlighter with you to the Examination Center. One of the forms of identification must include your photograph. You will not be permitted to bring this Orientation Guide into the Examination Center. Make sure to map out a route in advance of your examination date and plan to arrive at the Examination Center early since no one will be admitted late.

### **B. Test Security and Candidate Pledge**

All candidates will be required to sign a pledge form at each of the examination centers, stating that they understand that they will not discuss the content of the examination with any other person, study group, or potential make-up candidate. No one is permitted to take notes, or copy or remove test material during the administration of the examination.

Most candidates scheduled to take the examination will be sequestered (held in a separate room) either prior to their scheduled test time or after they have taken the examination. This sequester period is required in order to prevent candidates who have taken the exam from interacting with candidates who are scheduled to take the same exam later in the day.

Please note that candidates are NOT PERMITTED to bring any electronic communication or recording devices such as cellular phones, pagers, cassette/digital recording devices, laptops etc., into the test centers. Possession of one or more of these prohibited devices inside of the examination center will result in disqualification. In addition, brief cases and other personal items must also be left outside of the test center. Upon completion of the oral sequestering process, candidates must leave the testing premises so that other candidates (still involved in the testing) will not be disturbed/distracted by outside conversations. Failure to obey the rules and instruction before, during, and after the examination may result in a candidate's disqualification from the examination.

### **C. Description of Test Format**

Please note that the format of the test is subject to the review and approval by the United States Department of Justice. Consequently, it is possible that the test format/design could change prior to the administration of this examination.

All candidates will be permitted to participate in each of the four components of the Battalion Fire Chief examination which are:

1. Written Multiple-Choice Examination
2. Short-Answer Essay Examination
3. Structured Oral Interview
4. Oral Analysis/Presentation Exercise

### **3. Structured Oral Interview**

This exercise is designed to generate behaviours similar to those required for success in the Battalion Fire Chief position. Performance in this exercise will be observed and evaluated by assessors who have been trained to be fair and objective. They compare each candidate's performance to predetermined performance guidelines to determine who will perform effectively in a particular job.

This exercise, as all oral exercises, will be video-taped and observed by assessors at a later time. The questions will be given to candidates prior to giving their response. During this preparation period, candidates will have a chance to read, review and take notes in preparation for their response period.

The Structured Oral Interview exercise consists of five job-relevant questions about what they would do in certain situations. The questions deal with management activities and with fire-related situations. Candidates will have five minutes to respond to each of the five questions.

An example of the type of question that might be asked in the management area is:

*“Doing more with less” often translates to firefighters as “more work to do with less resources to do the work.” As a Battalion Chief, what would you do to assist the captains in helping the firefighters to confront the issues of funding, while building a better appreciation of what can be accomplished with current resources?*

An example of the type of question that might be asked in the problem analysis area is:

*You arrive with the first arriving unit at a grass fire that is approaching a house. How would you direct the unit to go about protecting the house?*

The particular dimensions measured in the Structures Oral Interview area are:

- 1 Oral communication
- 2 Management/Supervision
- 3 Analysis/Decision Making

### **4. Oral Analysis/Presentation Exercise**

For this exercise, candidates will be presented with a realistic job-relevant situation for which a new Battalion Chief might be confronted. Candidates will be asked to study the material related to the problem and then prepare a presentation to present to a monitor acting as a superior officer or other party. Candidates will be given a preparation period to study the material and prepare their presentation. For the purposes of this exercise, candidates are to assume the role of a Battalion Fire Chief and assume that their presentation is being made to superior officer or other party. Following the preparation period, candidates will be taken to another room where they will make their presentation to their “supervisor”. Candidates will be given 10 minutes to deliver

the presentation itself. Candidate presentations will be both audio and video-recorded.

All oral scoring guidelines are determined, prior to the examination administration date, by a panel of Subject Matter Experts using approved fire command and fire fighting practices. Scoring decisions are based on Subject Matter Expert-approved guidelines that address the situations that are presented.

The assessors for both the Structured Oral Interviews and the Oral Analysis/Presentation Exercises will be fire service personnel with Battalion Fire Chief or higher experience. Before actually evaluating any of the interviews, the assessors are given training on the dimensions to be measured and on how to observe and evaluate behavior associated with these job-performance dimensions.

The particular dimensions measured in the Oral Analysis/Presentation Exercise area are:

- 4 Oral communication
- 5 Management/Supervision
- 6 Analysis/Decision Making

## **5. Oral Assessment Exercises Dimensions**

The following are the assessment dimensions for the Battalion Fire Chief Oral Assessment Exercises. These particular dimensions were determined by the results of a thorough job analysis.

### **Oral Communication**

Effective expression in individual or group situations. Communicates with subordinates, other units, and members of the community. Is able to summarize a set of facts or ideas so that they are logical, clear, and understandable. Candidate demonstrates behaviors that show active listening (i.e., paraphrasing or repeating what the speaker has said, using clarifying questions to indicate that the message being delivered is the message being received, using questions to enable the speaker to explore and clearly express his/her ideas, using nonverbal communication to indicate his/her attention to the speaker (e.g., eye contact, nodding, body positioning) etc.).

### **Management/Supervision**

Knows when to take action and what action is appropriate. Takes action to achieve goals beyond what is necessarily called for. Is proactive, is able to effectively and appropriately schedule the work assignments of subordinates. Takes action to monitor the results of delegated assignments and projects. Demonstrates initiative in dealing with problems. Is effective in motivating others. Is assertive and self-confident. Accepts responsibility for the behavior of self and subordinates.

## **Analysis/Decision Making**

Knows how to size-up a situation; isolate the problem. Evaluates alternative courses of action and makes decisions based on reliable information and the outcomes of a thorough investigation. Can analyze facts, information, and evidence so that he/she can see the similarities, differences, and relationships between facts, situations, and events.

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**Due to the large candidate population expected to participate in the Battalion Fire Chief examination process, candidate responses to the Oral Assessment Exercises will be both audio and video recorded. Trained assessors will later review these recorded materials and score candidates based upon predetermined scoring benchmarks.**

## **D. Scoring**

All candidates will be permitted to participate in each of the four test components. The scores for each component will be standardized, weighted, and combined to formulate each candidate's overall examination score. Test component weights for the overall examination score are 23.74% for the Written Multiple-Choice Examination, 28.89% for the Short-Answer Essay Examination, 47.37% for the Oral Assessment Exercises (Structured Oral Interview and Oral Analysis/Presentation Exercise). The final score is a sum of the weighted standardized overall examination score plus the weighted standardized seniority score. The component weights for the final score are 70% for the overall examination score and 30% for the seniority score. Score calculation will be done following the same procedures used for the previous Battalion Fire Chief examination that was administered in January 2002. A more detailed description and explanation of the score calculation process will be given to candidates during the examination review period that follows the administration of the current exam.

**Please note that appointments made from the eligibility lists are conditional pending results of the appeal process.**

## **E. Suggested Reading List**

For specific information about the reading/reference list for the Battalion Chief exam, please check the Department of Personnel's website at [www.dps.state.tx.us](http://www.dps.state.tx.us) (address for the specific information guide).

## **F. Administrative Logistics**

### **1. Oral Assessment Exercises**

The Structured Oral Interview and the Oral Analysis/Presentation Exercise will not be administered the same day as the Written Multiple-Choice Examination and the Short Answer Essay. The Structured Oral Interview and the Oral Analysis/Presentation Exercise will be administered over multiple days with alternate test forms being used. When administered, one-half of the candidates for a given day will report in the morning and have the exercises administered to them. When finished, the morning group will be sequestered while the afternoon group registers. Once the afternoon group is registered, the morning group will be released.

Once candidates begin the test they will not be allowed to leave the test site for any reason until the administrators have released them. While at the testing site, candidates will not be allowed to move about without the specific approval of the administrators. Access to bathrooms is restricted and all candidates must receive approval and be escorted to and into the bathrooms. Anyone not following these rules may be disqualified. **Absolutely no exceptions** will be permitted. Candidates will be informed as to the date, time, and location of the Structured Oral Interview and the Oral Analysis/Presentation Exercise.

### **III. PREPARATION STRATEGIES**

#### **A. Preparation Strategies for the Oral Exercises**

**Try Your Best** – The exercises are designed to test candidate abilities. A candidate's overall evaluation is based on his or her performance on each exercise. Even if candidates believe they did poorly on one exercise, they should continue to try to do their best on the remaining exercises.

**The Exercises Are Set In A Hypothetical Fire Department** – This is done intentionally so as not to give an advantage to someone with a particular work background. Candidates should not assume the hypothetical fire department is modeled after a specific New Jersey fire department. Consequently, when responding to the exercises, candidates should take action and make decisions based only on the information that will be supplied to them in the exercises and not on assumptions they may make about a “modeled” New Jersey fire department.

Developing strategies for how to attack a problem is a good test taking technique, in that an organized approach is better than a disorganized approach or no approach at all. Predetermined strategies are fine as a starting point but cannot take the place of true problem-solving skills of the critical thinking that can be applied to changing circumstances and demands, either in simulation exercises or in real-world events.

#### **How Do You Prepare?**

As with the other portions of the examination, preparation should be an on-going experience and endeavor. The single most important thing to remember is that candidates are going to be assessed on their performance at a higher level, and the nature of those duties and responsibilities at a fire or other emergency scene may be somewhat different than as a fire captain. Thus, it is important to understand the role and the unique command responsibilities of a battalion chief.

Carefully study the battalion chief job. What are the duties and responsibilities at the fire scene? How does the battalion chief go about performing these duties? Are there certain things that are done no matter what? If so, what are they, how are they done, and when are they done? How does the battalion chief go about deciding what to do? What does he expect his fire captains to do without being told, and what does he expect to have to tell them?

Candidates know that they will be required to respond to major fire scenes and other emergency situations. Candidates should think back about recent incidents they have responded to and try to remember what the battalion chief did. Candidates should create their own scenarios and then go through the process of “commanding” that situation, using a format similar to that described in this orientation information to respond to it. Candidates should try to recreate the test situation as much as possible, sitting down, filling out the forms within the 30-minute time limit, and filling in the information they think they would provide on the test. When candidates review their work, they should do it objectively, looking for what they missed, did not make clear, or did out of order. If candidates have a study partner or group, each of person should develop scenarios and then critique each other's responses.

## **IV. SAMPLE MATERIALS FOR EACH COMPONENT**

### **A. Sample Items from Structured Oral Interview**

#### Management & Supervision

There is a captain under your command who has been a rising star. He has taken advantage of many opportunities to contribute to and move up in the department. Recently, you have noticed some minor rule infractions on his part. Today, for example, while on the fire ground, you observed him wearing a cracked face shield that you had ordered him last week to replace. Later, you questioned him and he replied that he had checked with the supply room, but was unable to find a replacement. He added that just like everything else, it's on order, and he walked away. How should this situation be handled?

#### Emergency

You arrive on the scene where a first alarm crew is responding to a warehouse fire. The warehouse contains the excess stock from a local furniture outlet. One of the threatened exposures is a 5,000-gallon pressure tank. The fire is burning in the northeast corner of the warehouse, and the pressurized tank is located near the southwest corner of the warehouse. What are your initial orders to the companies and what changes in conditions are you going to be alert for to evaluate the exposure hazards?

## **D. Sample Item from Oral Analysis/Presentation Exercise**

### **ANALYSIS\PRESENTATION EXERCISE**

#### **Candidate Instructions**

This exercise has been designed to evaluate your skills in analyzing information, decisions and presenting recommendations verbally.

The instructions for this exercise are as follows:

*You have been assigned as a new Battalion Chief in Middle Township, “a bedroom community” of Metrocity. Metrocity is located 18 miles northeast of Middle Township.*

*As part of your new assignment, you have been asked by Fire Chief Jim Rohrer to investigate the quality of station training in the Department, beginning with Station 6, and to compare the amount and quality of training there with that of the other five fire stations in the department.*

*Station 6’s district includes two elementary schools, the high school, numerous strip malls and two shopping centers. The rest of the district consists of middle-to-upper-class, single-family dwellings. The population of Middle Township is 72,435.*

*Chief Rohrer’s memo to you about the assignment is on the next page.*

## MEMO

To: New Battalion Chief

From: Fire Chief Jim Rohrer

Date: September 24, 2001

Subj: Departmental Station Training

Welcome to Middle Township. I am sure that you will find your new assignment rewarding and challenging.

Your predecessor, recently retired Battalion Chief Tim Connaly, was from the old school of firefighting in terms of station training. He felt that after-hours were meant for fellowship and for talking through the events of the day. Training was a necessary evil that occasionally broke through the routine.

I am telling you this because I am concerned about the consistency and quality of station training throughout the department. Station 6 has the worst reputation for consistent training.

Your assignment is to develop a plan for evaluating the consistency and quality of station training throughout the department, starting with Station 6. In your plan, I would like to see how you propose to bring in the other battalion chiefs so that you can get their support as well as their input.

This is a very important matter to me and to the department. As you know, we cannot expect our firefighters to be prepared to deal with emergencies in a safe manner if they are not prepared for handling the rigors of the incident.

Think the situation over carefully and present your plans to me later today at our scheduled meeting. I look forward to hearing your ideas.

## INSTRUCTIONS

You will be meeting with **Chief Jim Rohrer** at your next scheduled exercise time. You are to prepare written notes addressing the above issues. Be prepared to present your ideas and summarize your plan orally.

You will have a **preparation period** to prepare for your meeting with Chief Rohrer, and to make any preparations and notes you wish for your oral presentation.

Your Oral Presentation will occur at your scheduled time.

During your Oral Presentation you will have up to **10 minutes** to make your presentation. It is recommended that you **do not read your presentation**. You may, however, make and use any notes that you feel are necessary during the study period allotted to you. **You will not be assessed on your writing skills.**

In summary, your task is as follows:

- Prepare for your Oral Presentation in the period allotted.
- Make sure that your Candidate Number is clearly marked on EACH page of your notes.
- Report to the oral presentation room on time (i.e., at your scheduled presentation time. You will not be allowed to bring any materials other than your notes and these instructions into the oral presentation room.
- You will have up to **10 minutes** to make your Oral Presentation. You may take less time if you wish, but it is to your advantage to present a complete and detailed plan as possible. If you go beyond 10 minutes, the monitor will stop you.

## **V. DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL POLICIES**

### **A. Examination Make-Up Policy**

#### **EXAMINATION MAKE UP POLICY**

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 4A: 4-2.9, makeup examinations for fire promotional examinations may be authorized only in cases of:

**Error by the Department of Personnel or appointing authority.**

**Death in the candidate's immediate family as evidenced by a copy of the death certificate;  
or**

**Catastrophic injury or illness requiring an extended convalescent period, provided the candidate submits a doctor's certification containing a diagnosis and a statement clearly showing that the candidate's physical condition precluded his or her participation in the examination as well as documentation from the candidate's employer noting the candidate's related leave from work.**

- Military leave, which will be handled as stated in NJAC 4A:4-2.9(c).
- Exoneration from pending disciplinary or criminal charges will be handled as stated in NJAC 4A:4-2.9(d).

If you require a make up examination please call the Make Up Unit at (609) 292-9467 within 5 days upon receipt of your Notification Card.

Please note that all requests for medical make up examinations must be accompanied by the Department of Personnel's Medical Authorization for Make Up Examination form completed by the treating physician. The Medical Authorization for Make Up Examination form can be obtained through the Make Up Unit.

### **B. Post Examination Review Policy**

A detailed review policy will be provided at the examination center. As part of the review process, which will take place subsequent to the date of the examination, you will be given the opportunity to review the examination questions and their keyed answers. You will also be given the opportunity to review your test material and suggested responses.

### **C. Examination Cancellation Policy**

In the event that circumstances force cancellation of the examination administration, the Department of Personnel will attempt to contact your department head, as soon as that decision has been made. In the case of inclement weather, please call DOP's Information Center to find out the status of the examination or listen to your local radio station for further information. To contact the Department of Personnel's Information Center, call (609) 292-4144.

### **D. Study Groups**

The New Jersey Department of Personnel is not affiliated with any "study group" in the business of preparing individuals for examinations, nor does the Department of Personnel recommend participation in any "study group." Further, the Department of Personnel does not have authority to control or regulate the activity of "study groups." No "study group" has been involved in the development or review of Department of Personnel examinations and, at no time has any examination material been provided to such groups. Finally, the Department of Personnel is not responsible for any claims made by "study groups" or the manner in which they represent themselves for advertisement purposes.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

This preparation guide represents an attempt to familiarize candidates with all aspects of the Applied Knowledge Test and Oral Exercises, including the items and materials, logistics and evaluation approach. It also provides some suggestions for preparation. The suggestions provided here are not exhaustive — we encourage candidates to engage in whatever additional preparation strategies they believe will enhance their chances of performing effectively on the exam and on the job.

We hope that this Orientation Guide is helpful to you.